

HOLLYWOOD HISTORY

AT THIS POINT "UNTITLED"

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|---------|--------------------|
| GROUP 1 | 1. Winston Miller |
| | 2. Leon Uris |
| | 3. Kevin Jarre |
| | 4. Lawrence Kasdan |
| GROUP 2 | 1. John Ford |
| | 2. Preston Sturges |
| | 3. George Cosmatos |
| | 4. Lawrence Kasdan |
| GROUP 3 | 1. Victor Mature |
| | 2. Kirk Douglas |
| | 3. Val Kilmer |
| | 4. Dennis Quaid |
| GROUP 4 | 1. Henry Fonda |
| | 2. Burt Lancaster |
| | 3. Kurt Russell |
| | 4. Kevin Costner |

Edwin M. White
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This is a test. Does anyone know what the groupings signify?

In 1993, the United States Marines were sent to Mogadishu, Somalia as part of the international peace keeping force. Upon landing there and presumably at the first news conference a spokesman for the Marines stated to the press: "This may not be Dodge City, but Wyatt Earp's in town." A comforting thought? I guess it is comforting to those of us who have learned a distorted truth about Earp, the Hollywood truth about Earp. I guess the sentiment was, in fact, very good. What the Marine spokesman meant was that law and order had arrived in Somalia. His comparison of the marines to Earp was terribly misplaced and had he known his history he would not have made the comparison, for in Earp's lifetime the ranchers and cattlemen in Tombstone called the Earp brothers "the fighting pimps." Not a term of endearment. I am not quite certain if the United States Marines would officially like to be known as "the fighting pimps", but I rather suspect not.

In 1994 two major Hollywood studios made movies about Wyatt Earp. The groupings above list the writers, directors and actors for the two main characters in the four most famous Wyatt Earp movies. Quite a list.

Why two movies in one year about a subject that has been covered at least twelve other times by movies.

Maybe it's like the cover of Newsweek and Time. I mean how in the world do they so often come up with the same cover story? I guess there is no reason why Hollywood shouldn't make two movies about Earp in the same year. This year, for instance, we have two movies about Nixon, so maybe there is a trend.

We have had movies for about seventy years and so it appears that about every five years we can expect a new adaptation of the story of Wyatt Earp. Let's hope this Hollywood trend does not apply to Nixon.

Way back in the 1950's when at best there were three television channels (in black and white) and three networks, the only spectacles to be seen were at the movies. In 1956, in glorious technicolor, Preston Sturges and Paramount brought us Burt Lancaster and Kurt Douglas in The Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. I took what I saw on the screen as historical fact not realizing that artists arguably have license to make their subject matter more appealing and more sellable to the public.

However, as an impressionable young man vitally interested in cowboys and gun play and good men and bad men, I watched this movie as proof positive that good will overcome evil and that Wyatt Earp was more than a good man - he brought law and order to the west. I grew up in the last two great decades of Hollywood before the television industry grew into what it is today

and overtook Hollywood. I learned much of my history not from textbooks or from historical treatises but from the movies. Thus the title of this paper . . .

HOLLYWOOD HISTORY

This paper is not meant to be a criticism of Hollywood or the movies, for the movies have done one very real thing from a historical standpoint. Many of the movies that are historically inaccurate have truly given us something of value and the strength of those movies has been their visual authenticity. In fact, in 1936 the movie, The Charge of the Light Brigade, was made; interesting entertainment but terrible history. Warner-Brothers in order to stimulate a sense of authenticity among the crew reprinted replicas of Victorian postage stamps and used them on inter-office correspondence though none of those would ever appear on screen. However, the public was treated to the historically incorrect plot which some historians have criticized as being simply an anti-communist. The Charge of the Light Brigade had nothing to do with communism, but the War in the Crimea.

Critics of Hollywood often seize on what is called the howling anachronism: the Roman senator with a Timex watch on his wrist. Historians have noted other problems in movies. Michael Grant noticed busts that looked "suspiciously like Hadrian" who lived A.D. 76-138 in the 1953 film Julius Caesar and as Grant

points out, as we all know, Caesar, of course, lived from 100 B.C. to 44 B.C. In one of my favorite movies, Patton, criticism has been levied that the American tanks were in fact German made and had been rented from the Spanish Army.

But, Hollywood has given us wonderful examples of visual authenticity. The smaller mistakes being more of an interesting side note, I guess, to those movies that we all love. In All the President's Men, Warner Brothers built an almost exact duplicate of the Washington Post newsroom upon two sound stages in Burbank. The studio also ordered 200 desks from the firm that had supplied the Post and painted the room the identical colors of the original newsroom: 6-1/2 PA Blue and 22 PE Green. Warner Brothers even went to the extent of shipping trash from the Post newsroom to fill wastebaskets on the set. And in many other movies, Hollywood studios have often painstakingly reproduced the clothing, furniture and architecture of the past. In the 1960 movie, The Alamo, that John Wayne produced and starred in, his reconstruction of the Alamo stands to this day as a very satisfactory museum which many tourists presume to be the original.

But back to the Earps and Hollywood's version of their history. In the making of My Darling Clementine, John Ford said he wanted to strip the Earp story to its bare essentials. In the early part of the movie the Clantons murder the youngest of the

Earps leaving the three surviving brothers to pin on badges and gather evidence against the ranchers. But Ford's Wyatt is not simply after revenge; he wants something larger. Mark Carnes in his book, Hollywood History, relates that Ford wanted a sellable hero. In the scene at his younger brother's grave, Wyatt states "we're going to be around here for awhile. Maybe when we leave this country, young kids like you will be able to grow up and live safe." Then later in the movie when Wyatt finally finds the proof he needs, he tries to arrest the Clantons provoking the climactic gunfight.

None of this, of course, has anything to do with the untidy historical facts but that did not keep Ford from proclaiming the authenticity of his film. During his early days as a director, Ford claimed Earp would stop by the set and tell him about the old days in the west. A noted film historian, John Tusk, once asked Ford why he did not shoot the movie the way it really happened especially since Earp had talked to him about it. Ford then asked Tusk, "Did you like the film?" When Tusk admitted that it was one of his favorites, Ford shot back, "What more do you want?" Tusk concluded that Ford didn't give a damn about historical facts. What mattered was historical interpretation - the meaning that Ford gave to his story, that is the coming of civilization to the west. Ford expressed a similar sentiment in another great

film, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, one of his last films. He was quoted as saying, "This is the west, sir. When legend becomes fact, print the legend."

Even though movie westerns are concerned with history, they are still entertainment. They are not docudramas or documentaries and I guess to expect that of them is expecting too much. A little truth might not hurt, but Ford, like many other directors, claimed that audiences don't want historical facts, they want the meaning of history.

The two newest Earp movies, Tombstone and Wyatt Earp, each give us a different meaning. In Wyatt Earp, Kevin Costner gets the lead role (he also co-produced and co-wrote) and he was quoted as saying that his Earp was constructed within the boundaries of historical fact. Movie critics called this version long and boring but do not mention its historical content. So much for movie critics.

It is hard to upstage Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas as Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday. It's hard to upstage them in any movie about anybody in my opinion, but the other new movie about Earp did that very thing. In Tombstone, Kurt Russell gets the lead but Val Kilmer's portrayal of Doc Holliday steals the show. His portrayal is closer to what I want the truth to be concerning that notorious semi-bad man of the old west. But in both of the newer

movies about Earp, the writers got closer to some of the truth. In both, the Earps were portrayed as having other reasons for bringing law and order to a town they marshalled. In fact, in both movies they are seen to be running saloons with gambling games and with prostitutes. In real life, one of Doc Holliday's lady friends was a prostitute named Big Nose Kate.

All four of the movies focus on the battle for control of Tombstone. All four paint the Earps as good, the other side as evil. Costner's version does come closer to the truth concerning this struggle.

In My Darling Clementine, Henry Fonda as Wyatt represents good and Walter Brennan as Old Man Clanton represents evil, through and through. For this alone, their gunfight confrontation is inevitable, but the pretext was to arrest them for murder (a murder which had not yet occurred).

The gunfight in Gunfight at the O.K. Corral took ten minutes of the film. The fight actually took 31 seconds. To give us those ten minutes of film, the actors worked for four days, eleven hours a day. The Earps are portrayed as having no choice but to shoot it out with the Clantons because the Clantons were breaking the law, wearing their guns inside the city limits.

In neither of the two new movies are we told the real reason for the confrontation either. In both we are simply lead to

believe that the Clantons deserved being shot, that they picked a fight and they got one.

But what really happened. The first Earp to Tombstone was Wyatt's older brother, Virgil, who had been appointed deputy U. S. Marshall. In 1880 his three brothers, James, Wyatt and Morgan joined him there followed by other Dodge City friends who included Doc Holliday. The Earps continued to run with the saloon crowd, but in Tombstone they also made a serious bid for respectability.

Southeastern Arizona at this time was torn by conflict between the Republican business community and the mostly Democratic ranchers. The "cowboys" as the Republican Tombstone newspaper The Epitaph labeled the ranchers were led by Newman "Old Man" Clanton. This paper called his sons hot headed and said the Clantons were backed by violent gunmen, Curly Bill Brocius and Johnny Ringo. Both play more significant roles in the 1994 movies but only Brocius was of historical importance.

Then in October, 1881, the feud heated up. In his book, The Lawmen, Frederick S. Calhoun, the historian of the U. S. Marshall's Service, writes that southern Arizona epitomized the wild frontier during the late 1870's and early 1880's. The acting governor, John J. Gosper, ascribed the lawlessness around Tombstone to the insane rush for quick riches that mining for silver promised

but seldom delivered. If mining failed, money was still made stealing cattle or holding up stage coaches.

At this same period of time from Texas to Arizona, an unorganized border war was going on. Mexicans would raid across our border and we would raid across their border. The start of the movie Tombstone depicts just such a raid.

The raiders in real life as well as in the movie were labeled "The Cowboys". Their size was claimed to be 380 strong by Deputy U. S. Marshall J. W. Evans. Apparently when questioned further about this estimate he revised it to 75 to 100 members but added that "they are thoroughly armed and will no doubt fight desperately." The U. S. Attorney for Arizona wrote to the Attorney General of the United States that The Cowboys "subsist by rape, plunder and highway robbery" and they amuse themselves with drunken orgies and murder. He warned that "the evil is one, that feeding upon itself does not exhaust it, but causes it to thrive and it has now assumed alarming proportions."

The Cowboy troubles peaked in 1881. Throughout the year the Wells Fargo stage between Tucson and Tombstone was repeatedly held up. In between robberies, the Cowboys raided Mexico. In January they slaughtered forty Mexicans in Sonora. The following June, Mexican officials caught and killed eight Cowboys, one of whom was Newman H. (Old Man) Clanton. The following month The

Cowboys raided Mexico stealing \$4,000 and killing four Mexicans. The Mexican Ambassador complained bitterly to the U. S. Secretary of State, James G. Blaine. Blaine called the Attorney General; the Attorney General called U. S. Marshall, Crowley P. Dake. Dake looked to his deputy in Tombstone for help, but Deputy Virgil Earp (according to Calhoun) had more pressing concerns. He claims Virgil and his three brothers, James, Wyatt and Morgan had caught the money fever raging in Tombstone and were more interested in mine speculation, gambling and riding shotgun for Wells Fargo.

Virgil was also town marshall of Tombstone, making his living from the percentage he earned collecting city taxes and licensing fees from the town's store owners, professionals and prostitutes (a legal pimp?). To those earnings he added his fees for serving federal warrants. Chasing gangs of outlaw cowboys held no real appeal because it promised so little money for the effort.

At this same time, even after refusing to become a deputy U. S. Marshall, Wyatt ran for sheriff of Cochise County against the incumbent, Johnny Behan, an ally of the Clantons. Wyatt lost but the campaign strained the relationship between Virgil and Behan. Their political competition became personal when Wyatt took up with Behan's lover, Josephine Marcus. This also did nothing to improve his relationship with Behan.

During the sheriff's election, Wyatt had secretly asked Ike Clanton to help identify the men who had recently taken part in a stagecoach robbery. Wyatt promised Ike the reward because all he wanted was the credit for the arrest which he thought would help him in the election. Ike finally declined to help but they agreed to keep their talk a secret. Rumors, however, swept Tombstone's saloons that Ike had turned traitor. Each man now accused the other of breaking the vow.

On the morning of October 26, a chance encounter between Wyatt and Ike turned violent. Wyatt hit Ike over the head with his pistol. Virgil then arrested Ike for disturbing the peace. Fined and released Ike met up with his brother, Billy, and their friends, Frank and Tom McLaury. Ike bragged to anyone who would listen what he would do to the Earps.

Behan happened to walk by and Ike retold his story to Behan. At the same time, the Earps learned of Ike's threats. Virgil deputized Wyatt, Morgan and Doc Holliday. His authority for this came from his being town marshall not a U. S. Deputy Marshall. Virgil intended to charge Ike and Billy for carrying weapons within the city limits.

The lawmen strode purposefully down Freemont Street past the O. K. Corral to the vacant lot where Clanton was talking to

Behan. In both new movies, Behan then walks to the Earps and tells them that he has disarmed the Clantons. The Earps continued on.

"Throw up your hands," Virgil commanded, but Wyatt had already drawn his Smith & Wesson .44 out of his coat. He claims he saw Frank McLaury reach for his pistol. Wyatt fired. The bullet tore into Frank's lower abdomen.

Ike Clanton, unarmed and helpless, fled into Fly's studio next door. Doc, using the shotgun Virgil had lent him, blew a hole in the also unarmed Tom McLaury; tossed the shotgun aside and drew his Colt revolver.

Virgil and Morgan both fired at Billy Clanton. Hit in the right wrist and chest, Billy was knocked back, slumped to the ground and switched his pistol to his left hand.

Tom McLaury staggered down the street collapsing dead around a telegraph pole. Frank tried to escape. With one hand pressed to the hole in his stomach, he crossed Freemont Street after his horse. Doc turned after Frank. Billy Clanton shooting left handed hit Morgan in the shoulder. The impact of the bullet sprawled Morgan over a half buried water pipe. Rising to one knee he turned toward Frank just as Frank reached his horse. Both Morgan and Doc fired simultaneously taking off the top of Frank's head.

Billy Clanton fired next at Doc. The bullet hit Doc's holster, causing only a bruise. Billy, however, did not waste time watching the effect of his shot. He turned slightly to his left and fired at Virgil, hitting him in the leg. Wyatt and Virgil shot back, mortally wounding Billy. Still he refused to quit shooting until his pistol ran out of ammunition. Billy used the last of his strength to crawl out to Fremont Street, begging for someone to reload his pistol. But the thirty one second fight was over. Billy died moments later.

The street fight had very little effect on The Cowboy raids or on the violence in Tombstone even though U. S. Marshall Dake claimed that his federal deputies had rid Tombstone of the outlaw Cowboy element.

City officials fired Virgil as town marshall because of the shoot out. On the evening of December 28, 1881, Virgil was ambushed. Several rounds of buckshot tore out most of the bone in his left arm, leaving it floppy and lame.

Wyatt now begged Dake for a commission as a deputy marshall. Dake gave Wyatt his commission as well as \$3,000.

On March 18, 1882, Morgan Earp was shot in the back while playing pool with Wyatt. He died within the hour.

Wyatt went on a rampage. Protected by his friend, Holliday, and a posse of six, he killed three more men - Frank

Stillwell, Indian Charley Florentino and Curly Bill Brocius. Although the three men undoubtedly deserved punishment for crimes committed, Wyatt had no evidence against them, no warrant to arrest them and no legal cause to murder them.

Behan now formed a posse and went after Wyatt and Doc, chasing them into Colorado. Behan had warrants for their arrest for murder, Colorado refused to extradite.

Calhoun claims Behan had the final revenge because Josephine left Tombstone to follow Wyatt to Colorado. He claims that for the rest of Wyatt's long life, Josephine's quick temper and gratingly shrill voice tormented his peace of mind. No other historian reaches this conclusion though.

In April, 1882, General William Tecumseh Sherman recommended that the army protect the border and subdue The Cowboys. On May 31, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur proclaimed the areas in which The Cowboys operated to be in a state of rebellion which then allowed the soldiers to help the marshalls because the Posse Comitatus Law did not apply in areas of rebellion.

Within months law and order had been restored.

So is this U. S. Marshall's history the whole truth? Apparently not.

In an interesting book, The Earps Talk, the town historian of Tombstone, Alford E. Turner, assembled all of the court documents and newspaper stories surrounding this period of history.

He concludes that there are some things about this period of history that all agree on.

The Earps and Doc Holliday were in Tombstone in 1881. Virgil came first and was town marshall and a deputy U. S. Marshall. The Cowboys were lead by the Clantons and Behan faction. Each side had their own newspaper, their own bars and their own law.

The "gunfight" occurred on Freemont Street in a vacant lot near the O.K. Corral not at the O. K. Corral.

The fight occurred not because the Clantons/McLaureys broke the law but because the Earps pride was challenged. The triggering event was the dispute between Ike Clanton and Wyatt over who leaked the details of their discussion about the stagecoach robbery.

Three weeks after the shooting, an inquest was held before Judge Wells Spicer. Wyatt Earp's testimony was in the form of a carefully prepared statement which he read and he was not subjected to cross-examination. Even though most of the witnesses said Doc and Morgan started the fight, no charges were brought.

After Virgil was ambushed, Wyatt led a posse after Ike and Phineas Clanton, chasing them for thirty days. The Clantons, however, surrendered to Sheriff Behan who provided them with protection from the Earps. They were charged with attempted murder but were let go on a "technicality" concerning the warrant. The Earps charged that Behan and the Courts were protecting The Cowboys. Apparently each side had their own judges, too. Nevertheless, no trial was held.

After Morgan Earp was murdered, Wyatt and his posse chased those they thought responsible, the posse killed them rather than arrest them to turn them over to the Court. Behan, however, secured warrants for murder. Doc and Wyatt fled to Colorado. Colorado refused to extradite. Wyatt did not return to Tombstone. Doc died in Colorado in 1887 at the age of 36. Wyatt and Josephine ended up in Los Angeles where Wyatt died in 1929 and Josephine in 1944.

Where is the truth? Is there just one truth? The rival newspapers in Tombstone each took sides. One called The Cowboys outlaws, one called them "Democratic" ranchers with traditional rural values and Southern sympathies while calling the Earps and the townspeople Yankee capitalist modernizers.

In his book, The Hero with Private Parts, Andrew Lytle theorizes:

"Very few men who have helped determine the direction of society are remembered in their true character. They too often have attached to their names some felicitous phrase or symbol descriptive of a given moment in history which is never more than a half truth at best, but is generally a distortion of everything the once sentient man represented. This is due to the myth making instincts of the people. People will make myths, or have them made for them, suitable to the cultural images they want to hold in their minds."

When asked if a movie's larger meaning transcended its historical errors, Yale's John Mack Faragher came down in favor of meaning. Faragher concluded that history is not just a gathering up of clues but the assembling of them so as to make sense of the past. If a filmmaker succeeds at the latter, should one fuss about the former?

There is no question that the Earp movies have given us to believe that law and order was brought to Tombstone (and the west) by dedicated lawmen like the Earps. John Ford was right. His message was more important than history. The legend has become fact.